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Deaf President Now!  
Positive Media Framing of a Social Movement Within a Hegemonic  
Political Environment

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## Introduction

In the past forty years, social movements have galvanized thousands of people into collective action. Modern movements have closed nuclear plants, created affirmative action legislation, raised the working salaries of women and saved certain species from extinction. The power of collective action has forever altered modern society. By examining movements from a historical context and researching what factors created success or facilitated a movement's failure, scholars have the opportunity to better inform present movements and thus effect social change. Discovering how one movement succeeded in achieving their goals in the past may help explicate why another will fail in the future. The *Deaf President Now* movement has much to teach those who study movements and those who hope to benefit from what is learned.

Prior to March 1988, not many people in this country had read or seen any extensive information in the media concerning the deaf community. After the *Deaf President Now* (DPN) movement at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., much of that changed – if only for a brief period in time. The DPN movement shut down a federally funded university, garnered support from labor and union leaders, sparked debate on ABC's *Nightline*, organized several marches to the U. S. Capitol, received the blessings of various powerful political figures, achieved every goal the movement set out to meet and enjoyed positive portrayals in the mass media.

In order to reveal how DPN achieved such success it is important to review why the media have proven so important to nascent social movements. This relationship will be examined and juxtaposed against the issues that faced DPN specifically. A brief examination of the media coverage that social movements have received in the past and

possible reasons that have been attributed to the historically negative framing of political protest will be undertaken to further structure the coverage of DPN. Actual coverage of DPN will then be reviewed for evidence of positive or negative framing. Editorials and newspaper articles will be broken down into written representation and photographic content, in the hopes that some meaningful conclusions can be drawn. Finally, some hypotheses are offered as to the why the movement was so successful in gaining positive media coverage.

This research will show that DPN enjoyed positive frames in the media and suggests that this was due to the intended availability of protest sources, the lack of expedience on the part of elite sources, the peaceful means of protest organized into events by the students, the assimilation of 'elites' within the protest movement, the frame extension of the movements' causes, sponsorship from corporations, liaisons with journalists, the narrow focus of the movement, and the ideological assumptions of disability in society. The process of reviewing factors that may have led to positive framing in the media is imperative if mass communication research is to ever reach beyond mere description of frames to a deeper understanding of how and why these frames occur. This research will suggest that only through the complete combination of all the above-mentioned traits was DPN able to achieve it's goals. Furthermore, due to the unique characteristics of DPN it will be suggested that the positive media frames do not contradict any previous claims of oppressive hegemonic structures within political media coverage.

### **Role of Media in Social Movements**

News has become a political resource for social movements – an essential political resource. News provides information to others,

which can play a fundamental structural role in their decision-making (Gandy 1982). News is also an "authoritative version of reality, a way of knowing associated with high levels of cultural legitimacy" (Barker-Plummer, 1995, 3). Thus, news offers a type of membership of knowledge that participators engage in.

Gitlin writes that, "of all the institutions of daily life, the media specialize in orchestrating everyday consciousness—by virtue of their pervasiveness, their accessibility, their centralized symbolic capacity" (1980, 2). Media have evolved into a highly skilled system of networks that distribute ideology throughout the masses. Social movements must understand media structures and work within these confines if they hope to disseminate their beliefs.

As Olson noted, social movements are already fighting the almost insurmountable task of presenting movement initiation in an appealing way for the potential recruit (1965). Many individuals rationalize their uninvolvedness through what is called the logic of collective action. Potential recruits often reason that one person could not possibly make a difference. Believing that others will solve an issue, the logic of collective action has the potential to crush a movement before it even begins. Thus, the very nature of a social movement's existence is inherently fragile. Unfavorable media coverage can halt the growth of a movement — effectively slowing the process of social change. Therefore, it is increasingly important that media serve to create public awareness, confer status upon a movement, recruit new members and offer psychological support to members of the movement.

### *Public Awareness*

Without media coverage, many members of the public would not even be aware of a movement's existence. The public receives their

information concerning social groups primarily from the media. Relatively few in our society form their opinions of social movements through personal contact. Gitlin states that the media image, "tends to become 'the movement' for wider publics and institutions who have few alternative sources of information, or none at all, about it" (1980, 3).

In addition, media link movements with other political and social members of the public. Trade unions, political parties and governments can gain access to information concerning social movements through the media (van Zoonen 1992).

#### *Confer Status*

In media-saturated societies, "voice in the news is a key part of making one's 'account count' in the public sphere" (Barker-Plummer 1995, 307). News serves as a symbolic form of power for a social movement because with it, the movement has the possibility for achieving the social change they are striving for. The media have such strong power that if a movement is overlooked through the media, the possibility of them remaining a viable force for change drops considerably. Gitlin states, "mass media define the public significance of movement events or, by blanking them out, actively deprive them of larger significance" (1980, 3). Through omission, media can effectively bar a social movement from having any cultural significance.

#### *Recruiting Members*

Media are so essentially important to social movements because it is where they can influence potential recruits into their movement. Potential recruits often learn of a social movement through media coverage. Favorable coverage can confer legitimization upon the

movement and attract new members while unfavorable media coverage can discourage movement participation.

### *Psychological Support*

Molotch notes that media can provide psychological support to already active movement members (1979). Anything difficult takes an enormous amount of tenacity and strength – something that needs to be reaffirmed occasionally to upkeep. Thus, media can serve as a mental boost to members who are beginning to doubt their effectiveness within the movement.

Therefore, social movements find themselves in a perplexing position. On one hand they desperately need media to disseminate their meanings to a larger audience but on the other hand they have minimal control on the quality or quantity of reported information. They must face this dichotomy with a full awareness of the benefits and the shortcomings media coverage can bring.

### **Historical Relationship Between Media and Social Movements**

There are repeated cases of slanting, trivialization and outright omission of those who deviate from the norms of an elite media and form a political movement to combat injustice. Negative media frames have been discovered in the anti-nuclear movement (Entman & Rojecki 1993), the women's movement (Barker-Plummer 1995), the gay and lesbian movement (Jenness 1995) the National Environmental Policy Act faced a media blackout (Schoenfeld 1979). Many authors have attributed the media treatment given to those who deviate from the 'norms' of society to the presence of hegemony within the American press.

### *Hegemony*

Gitlin credits Gramsci for defining hegemony as, "a ruling class's (or alliance's) domination of subordinate classes and groups through the elaboration and penetration of ideology (ideas and assumptions) into their common sense and everyday practice; it is the systematic (but not necessarily or even usually deliberate) engineering of mass consent to the established order" (1980, 253). Thus, the ideas and values of the elites eventually become the ideas and values of the masses through a consistent penetration of ideology.

From his study of the Student's for a Democratic Society, Gitlin concluded that the further an issue is from the elite group's core interests and values, the more likely it will be overlooked by the media (1980). Entman and Rojecki have suggested hegemonic processes within journalism's reliance on elite sources that possess an "underlying professional ideology ambivalent toward public participation (155)." Ryan goes on to posit that, "for journalists, news means covering what the powerful do, not what power does (Ryan 1996, 19)."

In *Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky and Herman state that American media conforms to a propaganda model whose "societal purpose" is to "inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state" (1988). In *The Chomsky Reader*, the scholar is quoted as saying that the American press is "brainwashing under freedom (1987, xiv)." Chomsky strongly warns that the American press is a propaganda machine that controls and creates an apathetic public.

These assumptions of a hegemonic media structure are interesting when mirrored against the *Deaf President Now* movement at Gallaudet. Initially, the movement's success seems to contradict the question of



hegemony. However, this research will demonstrate that the framing of DPN does not contradict earlier theories of hegemony but rather, supports these claims.

### **Deaf President Now!**

In its 124 year history as a deaf college and university, Gallaudet University had never appointed a deaf individual as president. Being the only liberal arts college for the deaf in the United States, Gallaudet University is viewed by many within the deaf community as a symbol of pride. It is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to locate a deaf person in the United States who has not heard of Gallaudet. After making great strides within the hearing community during recent decades, many from Gallaudet began to question the absence of their own deaf president. These concerns came to a fore when the presidential position was again vacant and the search for a new president was undertaken.

Despite growing opposition on campus, the majority-hearing Board of Trustees for Gallaudet University selected a hearing president, Dr. Elisabeth Zinser. After learning the news, the protesters blocked off all entrances to the campus, formed several marches to the U.S. Capitol, held rallies, called press conferences, and formulated four demands. These actions are congruent with Tarrow's criteria for social movements: "collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (Tarrow 4, 1998). With thousands of protestors marching, the group would surely be classified as collective and based on a common purpose and while the movement was short lived, its efforts were clearly sustained during the period of contention.

After enjoying pronounced popularity in the media with less than a week of protest, the movement successfully achieved all four of their demands: the removal of Zinser and the placement of a deaf president; the removal of Spilman, chairperson of the board that elected Zinser; a 51percent deaf majority on the board of trustees; and no reprisals against any faculty, staff or students involved in the protest.

### **Methodology**

The coverage that does exist concerning the revolution at Gallaudet is relatively sparse due to the inflammatory nature of the protest. Prior to the first week of March in 1988, virtually no one outside of Gallaudet University was aware of the growing tension within the deaf community. Therefore, the media sampled is focused upon the month of March as it offers all of the possible articles concerning the *Deaf President Now* movement. The three publications sampled were *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and the *Silent News*. The *Post* was chosen as evidence of coverage within a major local newspaper while the *Times* was chosen to reflect national attention on the event. In an effort to find any contrary alternative coverage of the protest, *The Silent News*, a monthly magazine addressing deaf cultural issues, was sampled as a reference point to the deaf community itself.

Two separate reviewers who had no discussion of any projected outcomes coded the media content. If any disagreements arose, the reviewers discussed the point of contradiction until a suitable frame could be distinguished. Eighteen articles written in *The Washington Post* and eight articles from *The New York Times* were evaluated. The April 1988 edition of *Silent News* was the only to address the *Deaf*

*President Now* movement. Within its pages, twelve photographs and eight articles were available for review. However, upon closer inspection, the entirety of *The Silent News* consisted of articles and photographs picked up from other major publications – predominantly *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Therefore, to reduce duplication in the study, the *Silent News* was dropped from analysis.

In total, fourteen editorials, twenty-six articles and thirty-four photos were qualitatively reviewed and coded into framing categories for analysis. In the written article content, evidence of bias was determined from language usage in describing the activity of protesters or elites and the number of direct quotations of protestors and administrative officials. Editorials were reviewed under the same construction as article content. In both cases, the story or article was the unit of analysis. The photographic content was examined based on such photographic techniques as cropping, flattering/unflattering angles, and number of representations of protestors and elites. Each photograph served as the unit of analysis for this portion of the study.

### **Framing the Movement**

This paper follows Gitlin's definition of frames which states, "frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (1980, 7). This organization bestows frames with extreme power to record events into assembled structures of meaning. Hertog and McLeod state that, "the frame used to interpret an event determines what available information is relevant" (1995, 4). This construction of power and relevance is

integral in understanding the significance of the frames used throughout the coverage of DPN.

After careful scrutinization of the available articles written about DPN, it became apparent that the media frames were overwhelmingly and exclusively positive. When describing the movement, four substantive frames were found: effective conduct, internal unification, external support and justifiable action. There was a 92.3 percent inter-coder reliability between the two reviewers.

The most commonly used frame was effective conduct, with nine articles (35 percent) framing the movement as effective in their efforts to enact political change. Justifiable action followed the effective conduct frame with seven articles (27 percent). The justifiable action and effective conduct frames were used primarily in the later stages of the movement (see Figure 1). The third most popular frame was external support (23 percent). These articles focused on the contributions of individuals or corporations that were outside Gallaudet University. Finally, fifteen percent of the articles framed the movement as internally unified. The frames external support and internally unified were used during the beginning and middle stages of the protest.

#### *Effective Conduct*

An example of the effective conduct frame comes from the headline of a March 12<sup>th</sup> article stating that "Demonstrations by the Deaf Bring A Resignation but Not Yet a Truce" (March 12). In this article, the reporter draws a direct causal connection between the demonstrations and the resignation. Furthermore, in this headline the reporter alludes to the power of the movement by stating that there is not yet a truce, as if it will inevitably follow. In the article itself,

Zinser is quoted as stating that she is responding to a, "social movement" and a congressional member is quoted as saying that the movement, "sensitized the nation to your hopes and dreams" (Demonstrations by the deaf bring a resignation but not yet a truce, March 12).

In a brief article, entitled 'Message Heard,' the reporter writes that the movement, "made it clear how important it was to them to have an administrator who shared their handicap. By week's end, they were on their way to achieving that goal" (Message Heard, March 13). On the next day of coverage, the *Times* follow with another example of the effective conduct frame. *The New York Times'* reporter, writes that the trustees, "bowed tonight to demands of protestors" and follows with the subhead, 'Changing the World' (School for deaf picks deaf chief, March 14). The protests are noted for having, "shut down the school and sparked a national movement for rights for the deaf" (School for deaf picks deaf chief, March 14).

Further examples of the effective conduct frame came from *The Washington Post*. In an article dated March 9<sup>th</sup>, the reporter quotes Spilman, the board Chairman, as saying that "pressure is mounting on Capitol Hill" due to the protest (Protest may imperil Gallaudet funding, March 9). The reporter also states that the boycott was more than 90 percent effective in closing down classes on campus. This frame was continued on March 11<sup>th</sup>, the day that Zinser announced her resignation. The article titled, "Zinser Quits Gallaudet Amid Student Uproar" draws a direct correlation between the student-led protests and Zinser's resignation. The article notes that "student protests dominated the campus and the university has been virtually shut down since" (Zinser quits Gallaudet amid student uproar, March 11).

The final DPN article *The Washington Post* ran recounted a press conference the day before which featured Gregory Hlibok, "the student leader who helped bring (the selection of a deaf president) about" (Gallaudet greets its new president, March 15). Again, the movement is credited as the effective enactor of positive change for deaf people at Gallaudet and throughout the country.

### *Internal Unification*

*The Washington Post* led their coverage of DPN on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March with a story framing the movement as unified and determined. The articles' title, "1,500 at Gallaudet Urge 'Deaf President Now,'" illustrates the internal unification frame. The reporter writes that the protest was "unprecedented in its size and scope" (March 2). The article notes that the peaceful demonstration was, "held under a brilliant sky...was punctuated with cheers and chants and the fluttering of hundreds of hands in sign-language applause" (1,500 at Gallaudet urge 'deaf president now.', March 2). The complementary mention of the weather sets the tone for a vision of unified, peaceful protesters. To confirm the breadth of participants at the rally the *Post* reporter covering the event notes that it was "attended by a broad cross-section of the deaf community - students, faculty members, alumni and others" (March 2).

Another example comes from a later article by *The Washington Post*. This in-depth human-interest piece was about the four main personalities behind the movement. The article stresses the unity between the four individuals and the bond they share in this "common cause" (Deaf protesters test mettle on real life chessboard, March 12). The article even notes that all four individuals have "at one time or another, challenged each other in a race for the Gallaudet

student government president," (March 12) but that this issue has united them as a team. However, the article points that the unification spreads far beyond these four participants. The reporter states that each of the four protesters have three assistants, who in turn have three committees each, who in turn recruit other members.

### *External Support*

On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the running headline of *The New York Times* reads, "Campus Protest by the Deaf is Widening" (March 9). This example of an external support frame focuses primarily on the list of national groups who are joining DPN in calling for a deaf president. An article in *The Washington Post* confirms this frame and states that "hundreds of students and others from the deaf community participated., " in a "national effort by the deaf community to call attention to its cause" (Students close Gallaudet U., March 8). The presidents of the National Association of the Deaf and the Gallaudet University Alumni Association are noted as "denouncing" Zinser's selection (March 8).

The list of DPN supporters continues in an article titled, 'Protest Gained Empathy Nationwide.' This article finds support for the protest from the executive director of the National Association for the Deaf, then Democratic presidential candidates Jesse L. Jackson and Senator Paul Simon, then Republican presidential candidates Senator Robert Dole and Vice President George Bush, faculty members from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, activist Abbie Hoffman, leaders from the Cultural Association of the Deaf in Dallas; alumni from Gallaudet and the director of National Center on Deafness at California State University.

### *Justifiable Action*

The first example of a justifiable action frame in *The New York Times* is brief but presents the movement as rightful in their quest for change. The opening paragraph states that the board chose a hearing president over two deaf candidates, thus "triggering renewed protests" (New president protested at school for deaf, March 5). This direct link between the decisions of the board and the need for protest continues throughout the coverage. The March 8 edition of *The New York Times* speaks to the inevitability of protest as a result of appointing Zinser. Williams, a reporter for NYT writes, "despite months of intense pressure...two candidates who are deaf were bypassed" (College for deaf is shut by protest over president, March 8). The article goes on to voice the protesters concerns that the decision was paternalistic. The text then immediately follows with the fact that Zinser is the third president named in the last four years, alluding to some dissatisfaction with the position and the possibility that hearing may be a factor in the high turnover rate. Furthermore, the actual protest march was not mentioned until the second to last paragraph, which suggests to the reader that the march was only undertaken as a result of board actions.

*The Washington Post* first uses the justifiable action frame in a story detailing the accomplishments of Spilman, the college board Chairman. The article notes that she has a long history of civic duty, but that she has a fundamental flaw in her view that, "sees the deaf as handicapped people to be helped rather than as a distinct culture within American society" (College board Chairman abides little opposition, March 12). The board is questioned as coming from a "corporate mentality" when dealing with the deaf and that Spilman herself may have prolonged "the agony that followed" (March 12).



This article frames the movement as justified through the negative portrayal of Spilman. The piece presents the Chairman as neglectful toward the needs of the deaf and this disregard helped to lead the protesters to justifiably seek an alternative.

The following day *The Washington Post* ran a story linking the upheaval at Gallaudet to a "growing sense of oppression" (The silent world's rebellion for civil rights, March 13). The protesters were justified due to their history as deaf people who were, "long denied opportunities," and had endured, "years of pent-up feelings of oppression and second-class citizenship" (March 13). Thus the movement served as a "rallying point for grievances simmering for years" (March 13). The justification frame is used to describe the civil rights abuses that deaf people have suffered as explanations of protest.

In addition, all but one of the fourteen editorials and letters to the editors that addressed DPN framed the movement as justifiable. Barring this lone voice of opposition, the remaining thirteen letters to the editor were abundant with statements of justification for the weeks' activities. Most writers felt that the move to appoint a deaf president was long overdue and necessary for the cultural minority to thrive. They found the 124-year history of hearing presidents to be a statement of oppression, which needed to change. Almost without exception, the protesters were lauded as heroes for minorities everywhere.

### **Sources Quoted**

While the media frames offered conclusive evidence of positive support, the sources

quoted in the newspaper coverage of the movement solidified that position. An overwhelming majority of the sources quoted were protesters. The only day of coverage that provided more quotes from elites in opposition to the movement, was the day Spilman resigned from her position as Chairman of the Board of Trustees. However, overall there were 206 quotes from DPN supporters, which equated to 63 percent of total quotes (see Figure 2). Those in support of Zinser's presidency were quoted 37 percent of the total 328 sources quoted.

### **Photographic Images**

Of the thirty-four images sampled, twenty-one were of individuals who supported a deaf president. This compromised 62 percent of all visual coverage of the protest. Only thirteen images were of Board of Trustees Chair Spilman and/or Dr. Zinser.

#### *The Protesters*

The photographs of protesters were overwhelmingly positive. The very first image of student dissent from *The New York Times* was a group of fourteen students holding placards and blocking the entrance to the Washington campus. It is a forward shot with no evidence of cropping other protesters out of the image. The next image is of a sea of people peacefully sitting on the steps of the Capitol at a DPN rally. Later, the *Times* follows with an upward angled shot of ten students looking over the banner 'Deaf President Now' hanging from the U. S. Capitol. This angle and the backdrop of the Capitol bestow legitimacy to the movement and a sense of importance. The Capitol is used as a backdrop in four of the protest images. This symbol of freedom and social justice reaffirms the positive media frame of the

movement. Most of the shots are done with an upward angle, suggesting power and importance.

*The Washington Post* offers the same positive angle of the protesters. Their first visual representation is an elongated perspective of hundreds of protesters with signs. The editors follow that image with a singular shot of a man signing at the rally. He is shown passionately signing, presumably to lead the protesters into action. If any of the protesters are shown alone, they are signing towards something or someone else. Without exception, when shot alone, the protesters are energetically communicating toward a larger group, which suggests they are actively engaged in the protest.

Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet is framed by *The New York Times* in front of a cheering audience, smiling and actively signing. Here, he is shown as supported by his peers and actively signing — two qualities that are never portrayed in the photographic content of Zinser.

In most articles, the protesters are shown in large groups. When a protester is shown individually, it is in the context of a larger group. For example, one image *The Washington Post* ran is of a single man holding up a sign 'Deaf Pres is Demanded!' in front of hundreds of protesters. All of these articles denote a large mass of people united in their determination to have a deaf president. While the elites are marginalized in their solitude, the protesters are framed as a large united group of individuals.

The only posed headshot used for an individual backing DPN, is that of Rep. David E. Bonior who is decidedly removed from the debate. His duties as the chief deputy majority whip in the House, make him physically unable to attend much of the protest. Thus, his sterile

photograph makes some sense – contrary the imagery of Zinser and Spilman.

### *The Administration*

All of the images of Zinser and Spilman are of the women alone, with each other or dwarfed by an interpreter who is communicating their messages. This seclusion works in opposition to the sheer numbers represented in the images of protesters. *The New York Times* begins its imagery of Zinser signing, somewhat staged, the word 'Gallaudet.' This image seems to mock the newly appointed president when one reads the text, which states that Zinser knows almost no sign language. She appears to be demonstrating her one learned sign for the reporter and she is alone in the frame. The following image of Zinser follows this theme as she is again cropped down to her face and her hand signing 'I love you.' Her signing is not represented as active or communicative with another individual but rather symbolic. The next day, the *Times* ran a posed head shot of Zinser which denotes a detachment to the issue at hand. The image is a still frame taken before her appointment as President of Gallaudet and offers no semblance of emotion or interest in the protest.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the *Times* ran their first image of Spilman when she is announcing her resignation as Chairman. The editors chose an angle that puts the interpreter in three-fourths of the frame. This shot seems to have been used to denote Spilman's reliance on the interpreter and her own disavowal of the language.

A posed headshot of Zinser is used as her introduction to the readers of *The Washington Post*. Again, this type of imagery denotes a detachment to the protest and a physical removal from the situation. When the *Post* does not run a head shot, they consistently crop Zinser

down to her face unless she is accompanied by an interpreter. She is shown as a solitary figure and thus, less important than the masses of protesters who oppose her. When there is an interpreter in the image, they are given at least half of the space available. This tactic removes the visual power from Zinser and gives much of it to the interpreter. Again, this type of image delegitimizes Zinser.

### **Building Positive Media Frames**

A more holistic examination of how and why media frames are built permits a deeper understanding of journalist routines, media structures and movement organization. Reviewing factors that may have contributed to positive media framing is imperative if mass communication research is to ever reach beyond mere description of frames. Such one-dimensional approaches to framing research present a disconnect between the sources that created the text and the text itself.

Gitlin believes that there is very little a social movement can do to guarantee fair coverage from the media. He argues that "news will never adequately carry social movement discourses because of the economic, organizational, and ideological connections that news organizations and news discourses have to dominant power relations in society" (1980, 281). He concludes that media will inevitably cover stories through a hegemonic framework rooted in marginalization and trivialization because of the routines and practices, which are embedded in capitalist and profit-oriented ideologies. Chomsky and Herman agree when they suggest that the hegemonic structure of media coupled with the capitalist structure of the United States ensure negative bias toward marginal groups (1988).

While these theories have proven true in the past, they clearly did not materialize in the case of the *Deaf President Now* movement. In light of the well-documented historical marginalization social movements have received, the success of DPN seems rather startling. However, the following analysis of qualities DPN possessed during the days of protest should demonstrate that the long-anticipated triumphant outcome was almost predictable given the planning of DPN, the nature of disability within mainstream society and the activities of DPN opponents. Furthermore, for reasons presented here, the successful outcome does not contradict the theories of Chomsky, Herman and Gitlin, but rather solidifies their hegemonic assumptions.

#### *Elite Unavailability*

When the Board of Trustees of Gallaudet University announced its decision to hire Dr. Zinser as its next president, DPN leapt into action. Caught unaware, the elite sources within Gallaudet University were initially unavailable for comment. This condition continued as members of DPN blocked the entrances to Gallaudet and thus, barred the elites from entrance. This act alone may have been the most important indicator of the positive coverage to come. By blocking the elites out of campus, the movement effectively created a highly visible act of protest, which guaranteed coverage and they simultaneously removed the possibility that oppositional sources could be heard. Zinser and Spilman were stranded in their hotel rooms surrounded by pundits who updated them on campus activities.

The inaccessibility of these elite sources did not comply with standard reporter routines and thus, their position was bypassed. Their absence was noted in articles throughout *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. For example, one reporter notes that, "repeated

telephone calls to (Zinser's) home today were met with a busy signal " (College for deaf is shut by protest over president, March 8). Except in formal press conferences, the administration was comparatively inaccessible to reporters and remained sequestered off campus while protesters were available for literally 24 hours a day.

### *Organized Events*

Schoenfeld states that one of the reasons the National Environmental Policy Act did not receive coverage from either the special interest channels or the mass media was because it was, "not much of an event...it was more an amorphous happening" (1979, 578). In van Zoonen's study, she found that the women's movement in the Netherlands, *Dolle Mina*, were forced to create "spectacular events to attract attention" (van Zoonen 1992, 459). Montgomery also found that one of the most powerful and commonly used strategies in enacting social transformation on television is the organized protest event (1989). Magno reaffirms the need for sensationalism in media practitioners who overindulge in reporting spectacular, event-driven news (1996).

Molly Sinclair, a reporter for *The Washington Post* who covered DPN said that her newspaper was primarily interested in covering the story because, "when you get a large group of people together, large groups of students protesting, there is no way to predict what will happen" (Christiansen & Barnartt 1995, 67). The events DPN created fit well into the constructions of newsworthiness that the *Post* adhered to in their reporting. There were tens of rallies during the week of protests where effigies of Zinser and Spilman were burned on campus and two large marches to the Capitol were organized. While all

were peaceful, the sheer numbers of protesters present offered a tantalizing subject for the media.

### *Expanded Political Terrain*

The gay and lesbian movement found it's greatest source of power and strength when they "adopted multicultural perspectives" (Jenness 1995, 153). If a movement can incorporate many different cultures, genders, religions, etc. into their ideology, their base of support will naturally expand as well. *Deaf President Now* actively framed themselves as an oppressed cultural minority akin to African Americans in this country. In a passage often quoted in newspaper coverage, DPN equated the appointment of a hearing president as, "'unacceptable' and 'paternalistic' as having a white president appointed at Howard University," (College for deaf is shut by protest over president, March 8) a predominantly black college. Later during the movement, a *Times* article states that the protests, "represent the blossoming of a new civil rights movement, deliberately patterned on the black civil rights actions of the 1960's" (For deaf, Gallaudet was just a start, March 13).

The parallels drawn between DPN and the civil rights movement may have broadened the public base of support DPN desperately needed. By comparing DPN to the civil rights movement, protesters invoked a struggle that is recent enough to garner some empathy for their position by a large majority of the population.

### *Corporate Sponsorship*

Ryan, Carragee and Schwerner note that, "workers sponsoring stories routinely are underresourced and outspent by parallel corporate-sponsored public relations campaigns" (1998, 171). While there were no major



oppositional public relations' campaigns to speak of in the case of DPN, there was considerable monetary contributions offered to support the placement of a deaf president. Moe Biller, the president of the American Postal Workers Union, presented a check for \$5,000 to a DPN at a rally held on campus. Furthermore, the protesters constructed a telephone bank on campus to receive pledges of money and support. During just one day of the protest, according to *The Washington Post*, DPN garnered \$13,000 in monetary pledges.

### *Journalist Liaisons*

Much of the success of the *Dolle Mina*, a women's movement in the Netherlands, was dependant upon the "personal bonds with journalists" (van Zoonen 1992, 460). Reporters are overworked and underpaid in their efforts to deliver late breaking news (Magno 1996). Thus, a movement representative who wishes to gain coverage must not only be available for comment and questioning at the reporter's convenience but also must make efforts to form bonds with reporters.

DPN recognized the value of journalist liaisons and worked hard to create these bonds. Molly Sinclair, a reporter who covered the protest for *The Washington Post*, stated, "when you go to a demonstration like that, it is in the interest of the people having the demonstration to make my job easy...and they did" (Christiansen & Barnartt 1995, 67). DPN enacted a media coordinator, complete with assistants and fully developed committees (A feeling of pride dominates the campus: things will never be the same, March 13). This group of media contacts had a full assembly of interpreters at their disposal for communication with reporters and because of their permanent location at the entrance of Gallaudet, they were always immediately accessible.

### *Political Associations*

Ryan, Carragee and Schwerner note that "those holding institutional and political power have a far greater ability to shape the news agenda than alternative groups or movements" (1998, 168). These authors go on to state that "news organizations, true to their criteria of newsworthiness, favored sources with official titles and verifiable expertise" (1998, 178). This supposition proved true with DPN protesters and those who supported their cause.

*The Washington Post* repeatedly referred to the support protesters were receiving from national politicians. On March 9<sup>th</sup>, the Post ran a full article describing Rep. David E. Bonior's prediction that Gallaudet may lose federal funding if it did not concede to the demands of protesters. The newspaper again used this angle the next day in article titled, 'Congressman Urges Zinser to Resign.' Furthermore, throughout the coverage of DPN reporters referred to letters of support sent from politicians such as George Bush, Jesse Jackson and Bob Dole. These elite confirmations of support may have proven vital to the growth of the movement.

### *Disability*

While the most difficult to provide substantive evidence for, the ideology of disability itself may have offered DPN the edge they needed for a successful protest. The historical negative framing of political movements naturally leads one to search for difference within a movement that may have had some distinction with the press. What may have separated DPN from other social movements was the involvement of disability. Specifically, DPN may have been able to

gain such wide acceptance from the media and the public because of an entrenched ideological understanding of disabled individuals within the non-disabled community.

The sociological, structural, commercial and personal removal of disabled people from the lives of non-disabled may have created an atmosphere where those who were not deaf could support DPN without any danger of altering their own lives. The demarcation of disabled communities from non-disabled communities is generally so profound that any offering of assistance from the hearing world to DPN can be seen as a gesture that involves no repercussions, regardless of the outcome. Christiansen and Barnartt state that, "the public had nothing to lose in their support of the protest; DPN could be seen as a 'disability issue,' which would not only not affect them, but which was not even really challenging the status quo" (1995, 188). Hafferty confirms this position by stating that, "support cost (hearing people) nothing" (Society for Disability Studies Meeting 1989).

Furthermore, when images of disability have been introduced in mass media, it has typically been cast in terms of tragedy and charity or struggle and accomplishment (Yoshida, Wasilewski, & Friedman 1990; Harris & Baskin 1987; Biklen 1986). When viewed through this lens, DPN fit the stereotypical constructions of disability representation. Thus, the media may have bestowed positive framing upon the movement, not as an example of successful political upheaval, but as a story of struggle and subsequent accomplishment within the disability stereotype.

## **Discussion**

The four frames used by media in covering DPN were decidedly positive: effective conduct, justifiable action, internal unification

and external support. These frames met absolutely no oppositional perspective in the news coverage surrounding DPN – barring one letter to the editor. Rather, the reporting was exclusively unconditional in its positive emphasis. However, this positive framing does not dismiss the presence of hegemony due to several factors: the lack of expedience on the part of elite sources; the intended availability of protest sources; the peaceful means of protest organized into events by the students; the assimilation of 'elites' within the protest movement; the frame extension of the movements' causes; sponsorship from corporations; liaisons with journalists; the narrow focus of the movement; and the ideological assumptions of disability. These factors of DPN's success combined to form the perfect protest that elites could support and that would garner positive media coverage.

The coverage of DPN demonstrated that there are breaks in hegemonic discourse that do not undermine the concept of hegemony itself. Rather, the paradigm is continually renegotiated and contradictory. Only through the combination of factors discussed earlier, DPN was able to gain favorable coverage. DPN showed that it is possible to gain access to a hegemonic media but it is first necessary to understand the implicit rules of the hegemonic structure. However, by building strategies to work within these structures, acknowledges that the structure does exist.

*In Manufacturing Consent*, Chomsky and Herman state that the American media conform to a propaganda model whose "societal purpose" is to "inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state" (Chomsky & Herman 1988). In this case, the 'privileged groups' remained privileged while a small group of disabled individuals enjoyed the symbolic gratification of a deaf president. While still

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offering valuable lessons for other social movements, DPN did not alter the status quo and the media safely professed to have supported a marginal movement.

**Figure**

**Figure 1**

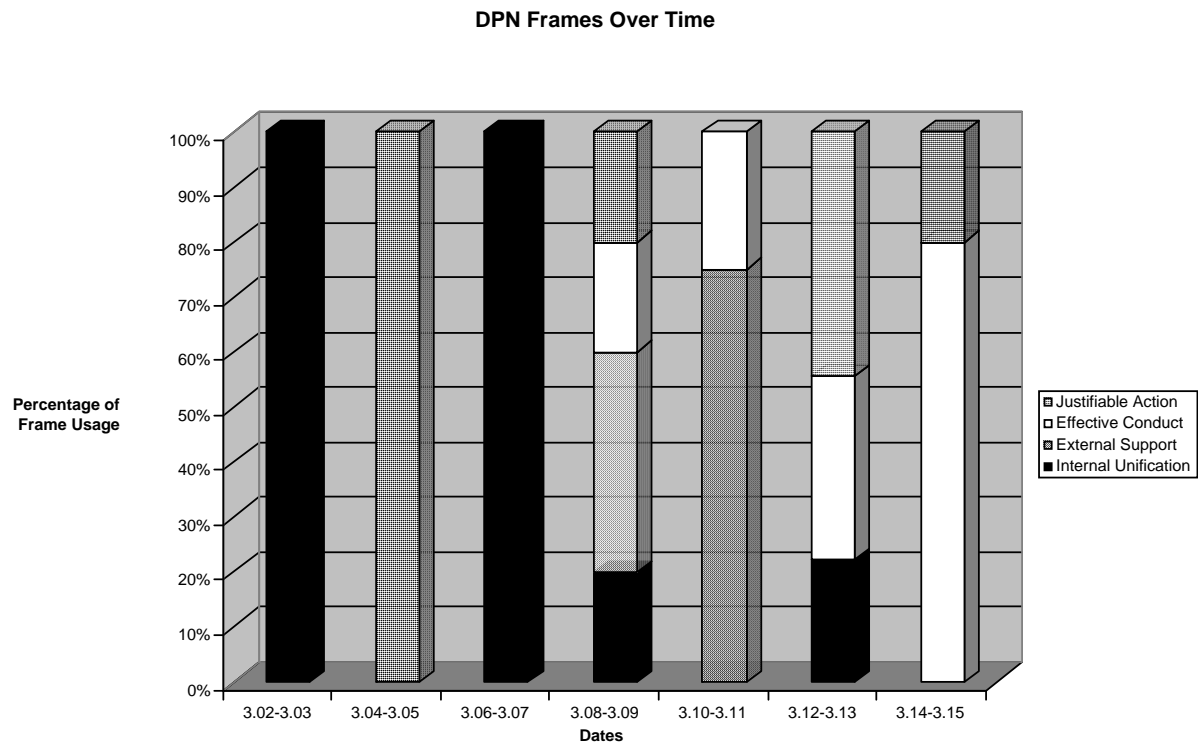
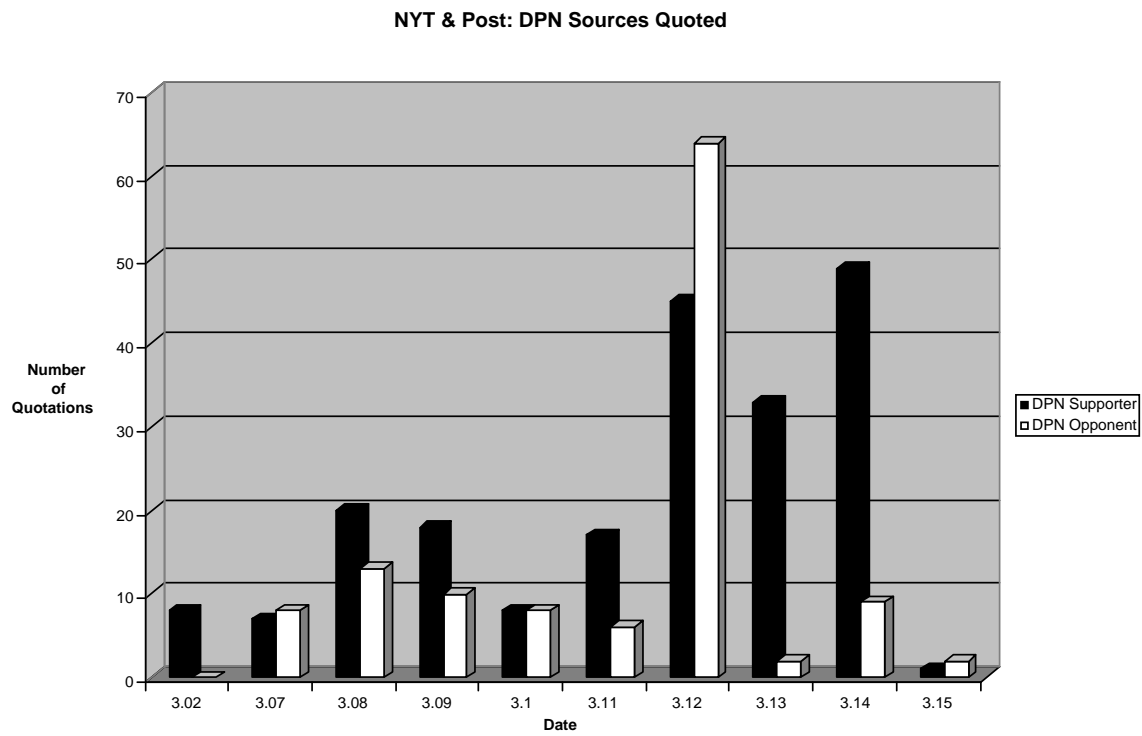


Figure 2



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